

Talking Points About Washington's Uninsured

Washington State Planning Grant on Access to Health Insurance

June 2004

The Washington State Population Survey for 2004 is being conducted now. Preliminary results will be available later this fall, including new information about Washington's insured and uninsured rates. In the meantime, this is a reminder of what we currently know from our 2002 survey. *

TOTAL POPULATION

- The TOTAL number of uninsured people in Washington **rose in 2002 from about 453,000 (in 2000)** to just over **506,000 individuals** (7.7% to 8.4% of the total population).
- About **60% of the total population** is insured primarily through an **employer**; **nearly 5%** is insured primarily by purchasing **individual** insurance, and **nearly 28%** is insured primarily through **public programs** such as Medicaid, Basic Health and Medicare.
- **Over 99%** of the total uninsured population is **under age 65**.

UNDER-AGE-65 POPULATION

The uninsured rate for the UNDER-AGE-65 population **is rising** everywhere in the state: north-south, east-west, urban-rural. We now have nearly **503,000** uninsured under-age-65, (about **15% of whom are children**.) The uninsured are members of working families, they are poor, they are young, and many do not have dependent children.

- **Nearly 70%** are **members of working families**.
- **58%** are members of **families that earn less than 200% of federal poverty** (roughly \$36,200 for a family of four in 2002).
 - The state's median income in 2002 was \$49,898.
 - Minimum wage in 2002 was \$6.90 in Washington, which means a family of 4 with two wage earners, each earning minimum wage, would have earned \$29,146 in 2002.
- **Close to half** are **both low-income and members of working families**.
- While most are in low-income families, **middle-income families make up a fast growing segment** of the population without health insurance. This group includes people who lost their jobs during the economic downturn. (For example, the group of uninsured with incomes over 300% of federal poverty represents about 23% of Washington's total uninsured population.) Many **middle class families are only one "pink slip" away from being without health insurance**.
- **Close to half** are **adults without dependent children**.
- **Close to 45%** are **young adults age 19-34**. (However, when young adults are offered and eligible for their employer's health insurance program they typically do sign up.)
- Although most of the uninsured are **white**, minority or ethnic groups are more likely to be uninsured (**e.g., about 15% of Hispanics and 17% American Indian/Alaskan Natives are uninsured whereas only about 9% of whites are uninsured**).

* Impacts of Washington's recession (beginning in 2001) on uninsured rates were likely captured in the 2002 survey results; the 2004 survey however will give us a better handle on the impacts of changes to public programs that occurred since 2002, e.g., estimates of the number of children who have lost coverage vary but are in the thousands and we presume (although don't know for sure) that many of these children are now uninsured.

MAKING HEALTH CARE WORK FOR EVERYONE

REASONS FOR BEING UNINSURED

The reasons people typically give for not having health insurance (i.e., in national surveys as well as in the Washington state population survey) are:

- **Insurance is unaffordable.** (Overwhelmingly this is the reason given for not having health insurance!) Families cannot meet their basic living expenses (e.g., housing, food, clothing, child care, transportation) when they have incomes below 100% of federal poverty and the additional expense of health insurance is unaffordable. In Washington, many families cannot afford to buy health insurance unless their incomes are above 250% of federal poverty.
- **Their employer doesn't offer health insurance** or in some cases the employer may offer it but the person is not eligible for it. (This can occur for a variety of reasons, such as the person does not work full-time.)
- **They're unemployed or in-between jobs.**
- **Another family member has insurance but it doesn't cover the whole family.**
- **They can't get insurance** or were refused it because of poor health or age.
- **They don't think it's needed** because they're healthy (these are usually young adults.) This is rarely the reason people give for not having health insurance.

WHY ELSE ARE PEOPLE UNINSURED?

- Many who lack access to affordable private insurance **don't qualify for public programs** such as Medicaid and the Basic Health. Adults without dependent children typically don't qualify for Medicaid; and because Basic Health has limits on its total enrollment, many of those who might otherwise qualify for Basic Health can't get in.
- **Procedural complexities** added to the application and renewal processes for public programs **have become barriers to enrollment** and may have led to a loss in coverage.
- Other barriers to enrollment include **lack of knowledge about insurance options** and how to access them.

WEB LINKS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL

- General Rates of Uninsurance <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/researchbriefs/brief016.pdf>
- Health Insurance by Work Characteristics <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/researchbriefs/brief022.pdf>
- General Characteristics of the Uninsured <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/researchbriefs/brief019.pdf>

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Project funded by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Professions State Planning Grant #1 P09 OA 00002-01

For further information on Washington's uninsured population:

- See: <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/accesshealth/accesshealth.htm> or
- Contact the State Planning Grant team
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